



**Revision of
Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria
For Destinations (GSTC-D)**

Terms of Reference

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The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

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Document Control

This is version 3.0 of the Terms of Reference for the Revision of the GSTC-D, 2018-19.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Revision of GSTC-D

The purpose of this Terms of Reference document is to set out the need and requirements for the revision of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (hereafter referred to as GSTC-D) and the processes to be followed.

The GSTC-D were developed through a stakeholder consultation process leading to their initial publication (Version 1.0) on 1st November 2013. This is the first revision of the criteria. The current reference version of the GSTC-D criteria that are to be revised is: “Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria VERSION 1, 1 NOVEMBER 2013 and Suggested Performance Indicators VERSION 1, 10 DECEMBER 2013 for Destinations”, available at <https://www.gstccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Dest- CRITERIA and INDICATORS 6-9-14.pdf> .

This document provides a brief overview of the background and context of the GSTC-D. It then sets out the need for the criteria and for their revision, their scope, their objectives and uses and the outcomes intended from their use, including attendant risks.

A final section of the document outlines the stages that will be followed in the revision process. The process will be overseen by the International Standards Working Group (ISWG) of the GSTC.

The development and content of these Terms of Reference meets one of the requirements of the ISEAL Standard Setting Code, referred to below.

1.2 ISEAL Standard Setting Code

ISEAL is a non-governmental organisation whose mission is to strengthen sustainability standards systems for the benefit of people and the environment. ISEAL is the global leader in defining and communicating what good practice looks like for sustainability standards through guidance and credibility tools, which include three Codes of Good Practice:

- The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards (Standard-Setting Code)
- The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Assuring Compliance with Social and Environmental Standards (Assurance Code)
- The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards Systems (Impacts Code)

ISEAL members include many of the world’s most respected standard-setting organisations and accreditation bodies. They drive the sustainability standards movement forwards across various sectors, improving its effectiveness and increasing its impacts. To become a member, organisations must meet ISEAL’s membership and code compliance requirements and progress through ISEAL’s membership application process.

Having previously been an ISEAL Associate Member, GSTC is currently a Subscriber. They remain committed to compliance to the three codes and intend to re-apply for membership in 2019. Hence the importance of

this review of GSTC-D criteria being in compliance with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice: Setting Social and Environmental Standards, Version 6.0 – December 2014 [(ISEAL) Standard-Setting Code]¹.

GSTC compliance with aspects of the Standard-Setting Code was reviewed and presented to a meeting of the GSTC International Standards Working Group, held on 21st September 2018. The paper presented a systematic review of the outcomes, requirements, guidance and aspirational good practice as contained in the ISEAL Code, in relation to:

- procedures followed relating to GSTC-I (Industry) Criteria and their revision in 2016;
- proposals relating to GSTC-D (Destination) Criteria and their planned revision in 2018-19.

As a result of the meeting, the ISWG instructed GSTC to go ahead and prepare these Terms of Reference for the revision process.

¹ The public review and revision process for the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code takes place every four years. The next review is scheduled for 2018 but appears not yet to have been notified.

2 Background and context

2.1 Tourism and sustainability

Travel and tourism account for around 10% of the world's economic activity. It is a rapidly growing sector, with international tourist arrivals forecast to grow from 1.3 billion in 2017 to over 1.8 billion in 2030²

The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 are aimed at, inter alia, ending extreme poverty, fighting inequality and justice and tackling climate change. The significant relevance of tourism to the 17 SDGs has been recognized. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is working with governments, public and private partners, development banks, international and regional financial institutions, UN agencies and international organizations to achieve the SDGs, with a special focus on Goal 8 (economic growth), Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production patterns) and Goal 14 (marine resources) where tourism has been specifically featured.

The impact of travel and tourism on global and local environments and on host communities can be both positive and negative, providing both opportunities and responsibilities.

Negative impacts and concerns associated with travel and tourism include:

- Its contribution to climate change, being responsible for an estimated 5% of global CO₂ emissions which is growing rapidly;
- Depletion of natural and precious resources, such as the use of land and water;
- Creation of pollution of all kinds;
- Social changes and dislocation of traditional societies;
- Pressure on cultural heritage sites, natural environments and biodiversity;
- Poor labour conditions and exploitation in parts of the sector.

Travel and tourism can also deliver many positive benefits, including:

- A growing opportunity for enterprise development and employment creation, with low barriers for entry;
- Direct and indirect support for local communities, through the provision of jobs, income, services and infrastructure;
- Awareness of natural and cultural heritage and support for their conservation;
- Health, wellbeing and educational benefits for tourists and hosts, which should be accessible to all.

Sustainable tourism requires an approach to tourism development and management that recognises and responds to these responsibilities and opportunities.

² UN World Tourism Organisation, Tourism Highlights 2018 Edition

2.2 The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council is a global, multi-stakeholder membership organisation dedicated to setting baseline sustainability standards for travel and tourism and applying the standards as an Accreditation Body that governs certification of sustainable products.

Born as a strategic coalition of partners (the UN Foundation, the UN Environmental Program, the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), and Rainforest Alliance, supported by many others), the GSTC brings together businesses, governments, non-governmental organisations, academia, individuals and communities engaged in and striving to achieve best practices in sustainable tourism. The GSTC serves as the international body for promoting education, understanding and adoption of sustainable tourism practices.

GSTC's vision is for tourism to fulfil its potential as a vehicle for social, cultural and economic good while removing and avoiding any negative impacts from its activities in terms of environmental and social impacts.

It seeks to achieve this by

- developing International Standards
- serving as the Accreditation Body for sustainability in travel and tourism
- helping destinations to become more sustainable
- promoting market access
- increasing knowledge

2.3 Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria

At the core of the work of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council are (currently) two sets of established and managed global sustainable standards, known as the GSTC Criteria. These are the globally-applicable guiding principles and minimum requirements that any tourism business or destination should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources, while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for conservation and poverty alleviation. They were developed, and continue to be periodically revised, through extensive public consultation throughout the globe, in both developed and developing countries, striving to adhere to the Standard-Setting Code of the ISEAL Alliance. They serve as vital tools for elevating good practice and policy, as well as driving market demand, by all players in travel and tourism.

The GSTC Criteria have been built on decades of prior work and experience around the world, taking into account the numerous guidelines and standards for sustainable tourism from every continent. They are arranged in four pillars:

1. Sustainable management
2. Socioeconomic impacts
3. Cultural impacts
4. Environmental impacts (resource consumption, reducing pollution, conserving biodiversity and landscapes)

The Criteria are the minimum, not the maximum, which businesses, governments, and destinations should achieve to approach social, environmental, cultural, and economic sustainability. Since tourism destinations each have their own culture, environment, customs, and laws, the Criteria are designed to be adapted to local conditions and supplemented by additional criteria for the specific location and activity.

The GSTC Strategic Plan 2018 states that GSTC will continue to promote the widespread application of the GSTC Criteria as global baseline standards for sustainable travel and tourism. The Criteria serve as vital tools for elevating good practice and policy, plus driving market demand, by all players in travel and tourism.

There are currently two sets of GSTC Criteria:

1. GSTC Industry Criteria, relating to the sustainable management of the private sector travel industry, focusing currently on Hotels and Tour Operators.

2. GSTC Destination Criteria, relating to the sustainable management of tourism destinations and intended for public policy-makers and destination managers.

Both sets of Criteria, together with associated Performance Indicators, are publicly available for download from the GSTC website. While the official language of the GSTC Criteria is English, translations into a number of languages are available. GSTC-I were last revised in 2016, while GSTC-Destination were first released in 2013 and are due for revision in 2018.

3 GSTC – Destinations

3.1 Need

The management of destinations is critically important to the sustainability of tourism. It is at the destination level that the various elements that make up the tourism product are brought together, including natural and cultural assets, transport and other infrastructure and a wide range of visitor facilities and services. Tourism planning, development promotion and control and the management of visitors and resources all occur within destinations. A standard and criteria are needed to ensure that these functions are designed and implemented in ways that fully comply with sustainable tourism principles and practices.

The GSTC-D were established to meet this need. Their development in 2012/13 was based on already recognized criteria and approaches including, for example, the UNWTO destination level indicators, GSTC Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators, and nearly 40 other widely accepted principles and guidelines, certification criteria and indicators.

In the last five years, the importance of destination management and adherence to sustainability principles has been further underlined. Various trends in tourism development and activities, together with new or increasing internal and external pressures, point to the need to review the GSTC-D to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. These include, amongst others:

- Growing concern about negative impacts on communities and environments resulting from high volumes of visitation in certain locations, sometimes referred to as ‘over tourism’.
- The increasing importance of public-private partnerships, including in the changing makeup and function of local tourism organisations, with increasing private sector leadership and funding combined with a growing need to address destination management issues alongside marketing.
- The advent of new forms of tourism product based on the so-called sharing economy, providing opportunities but also pressures on local communities.
- The need to improve the resilience of the tourism sector within destinations, in the face of disruption caused by climate change, unrest, insecurity and other concerns.

3.2 Scope

The GSTC-D have been designed for destinations. The criteria do not relate to a single body but rather to a named location/place/area that can be uniquely identified.

A destination has been defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as: “A physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries in which a visitor can spend an overnight. It is the cluster (co-location) of products and services, and of activities and experiences along the tourism value chain and a basic unit of analysis of tourism. A destination incorporates various stakeholders and can network to form larger destinations”.

While GSTC-D relate to the place, not to a body, the criteria are most likely to be taken up by and applied through a destination management organisation which is responsible for a coordinated approach to

sustainable tourism within the destination. The existence of such an organisation is a central requirement of the GSTC-D (currently Criterion A2 in GSTC-D Vs1, November 2013). It should be noted that such an organisation is not necessarily a local authority or public sector body³ and requires the involvement of both the public and private sector.

The wording and terminology applied to the definition of a destination or a destination management organisation may vary between users of the GSTC-D, while the general meaning remains the same.

The scope of the GSTC-D is broad and the criteria can be applied to a wide range of destinations. They may be in any part of the world and of any type (e.g. urban, rural, mountain, coastal or mixed). The criteria can relate to large destinations (e.g. sizeable cities or regions) and to small ones (e.g. national parks, clusters of local communities, etc.).

The content of the GSTC-D is designed to meet the full range of managerial, economic, socio-cultural and environmental issues affecting the sustainability of tourism in destinations. The revision should reflect new trends and sustainability challenges faced by them

3.3 Objectives and uses

Destination management organizations are able to make use of the GSTC Destination Criteria in a variety of ways. For example, they may:

- Serve as basic guidelines for destinations which wish to become more sustainable
- Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism destinations
- Serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize destinations and inform the public regarding their sustainability
- Help certification and other voluntary destination level programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly accepted baseline
- Offer governmental, non-governmental, and private sector programs a starting point for developing sustainable tourism requirements
- Serve as basic guidelines for education and training bodies, such as hotel schools and universities.

A GSTC-Recognized process is designed to be applicable to all schemes certifying tourism enterprises or destinations for their sustainability management and performance. GSTC-Recognized means that the GSTC recognizes equivalence of a certification body's standard (criteria) against GSTC Criteria (Industry or Destinations). GSTC-Recognized Standards for Destinations are sustainable tourism standards that adhere to and are equivalent to the GSTC Destination Criteria.

³ The UNWTO defines a 'DMO' as: "The leading organizational entity which may encompass the various authorities, stakeholders and professionals and facilitates tourism sector partnerships towards a collective destination vision. The governance structures of DMOs vary from a single public authority to a public/private partnership model with the key role of initiating, coordinating and managing certain activities such as implementation of tourism policies, strategic planning, product development, promotion and marketing and convention bureau activities. The functions of the DMOs may vary from national to regional and local levels depending on the current and potential needs as well as on the decentralization level of public administration. Not every tourism destination has a DMO".

Relevant certification schemes and the bodies that run them vary from national schemes, some with support from government agencies, to smaller schemes covering more local areas. They may include international operations. To date, eleven standards have been Recognized as aligned with the GSTC Criteria for Destinations.

A Certification Body⁴ that utilizes a GSTC-Recognized standard may apply for GSTC-Accreditation which relates to the quality and neutrality of their certification process. Two of the eleven GSTC-Recognized Standards for Destinations standards are currently in use for GSTC-Accredited Certification

Managing destinations sustainably requires a process of continuous improvement and the GSTC Destination Criteria provide the basic framework in the process. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council offers a Destination Development Program, a specialist program for destinations wishing to become more sustainable, which is associated with a Roadmap for Sustainable Destinations. GSTC offers four key resources for destination managers:

1. GSTC Destination Criteria provide the essential tool for defining “sustainable destinations”, for raising awareness among stakeholders, for measurement and monitoring, and more.
2. GSTC Destination Assessments can be made by GSTC’s own internal expert assessors of how well policies and practices adhere to the GSTC Destination Criteria, a useful tool for understanding how sustainable current practices are and learning where to improve and where to maintain good practice.
3. GSTC Accredited Certification Bodies can also conduct destination assessments based on their GSTC-Recognized standards. EarthCheck and Green Destinations are currently GSTC Accredited Certification Bodies.
4. A GSTC Destination Sustainable Tourism Training Program is designed to inform policy-makers and destination managers on the core issues of sustainable tourism as outlined in GSTC-D.

Goal 6 of the GSTC Strategic Plan 2018 is to support the enhancement of tourism destinations’ sustainable policies and practices through the application of the GSTC Destination Criteria and GSTC Destination Program. In 2018, GSTC seeks to support this goal through two streams of activity:

- a) Encourage the widespread adoption by destinations of the GSTC Destination Criteria
- b) Support destinations to manage more sustainability via the Sustainable Tourism Training Program and GSTC Criteria-based assessments.

3.4 Outcomes

The intended outcome of the existence and application of the GSTC-D is for more destinations to understand the full requirements of sustainable tourism and to put in place and maintain management processes to meet them.

The ISEAL Standard-Setting Code requires the Terms of Reference for this revision process to consider the need to include or update a statement of clear social, environmental and economic outcomes that the standard seeks to achieve and how those are linked to the organisation’s intended change. In reviewing the requirements of the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code at the outset of this process, GSTC chose to focus on Sections 4 (General Provisions) and 5 (Standards Development and Revision). However, it is recognized that full compliance with the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code will require consideration of Section 6 (Standards’ Structure and Content), including Clause 6.1 (Sustainability Outcomes) and also of the ISEAL

⁴ Certification Bodies are also known to some stakeholders as Conformity Assessment Bodies

Impacts Code, including explicit consideration of both outcomes and risks. The starting point will be a clear and explicit statement of the defined social, environmental and economic outcomes.

The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards Systems (Impacts Code) supports standards systems to measure and improve the results of their work and to ensure that standards are delivering the desired impact. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems track progress toward achieving intended outcomes and evaluate the contribution that the standards system makes toward achieving long-term social, environmental or economic impacts. The GSTC CEO has proposed that further consideration of the requirements of the ISEAL Impacts Code should take place in Q1 of 2019.

To date, compliance with the ISEAL Impacts Code has focussed on the GSTC Accreditation Program. Goal 5 of the GSTC Strategic Plan 2018 states that GSTC will develop an impacts reporting mechanism per the ISEAL Alliance Impacts Code. GSTC is currently supporting this goal through recent developments in the Accreditation Program which allow for the significant reporting that relates to both the ISEAL Assurance Code and the Impacts Code.

3.5 Risks

Some risks and unintended consequences could arise from the use of the GSTC-D. These are summarised in the table below with mitigation approaches identified.

RISK	MITIGATION
The criteria are too complex and appear off-putting to destinations, thereby dissuading them from addressing tourism sustainability issues	Keep the number of criteria to a necessary minimum and ensure that the wording is simple and clear
The criteria allow destinations to fall short in meeting aspects of tourism sustainability	Ensure that the criteria are fully comprehensive of sustainability issues and are sufficiently challenging to stimulate improvements
A destination claims to be meeting the requirements of GSTC-D but is not doing so	Destinations publicly claiming alignment with the GSTC-D should be certified by schemes that are GSTC-Accredited.
Destination performance in the management of sustainable tourism is not maintained over time	Require destinations to undertake regular monitoring and reporting of performance and include this within the criteria

4 The revision process

4.1 Key requirements of the process

Goal 1 of the GSTC Strategic Plan 2018 is to maintain the GSTC Criteria for relevance to current market conditions. In 2018, GSTC seeks to support this goal through two streams of activity, of which the first is to revise the GSTC Destination Criteria, managing the revision process in compliance with the Standard-Setting Code of the ISEAL Alliance.

Through its International Standards Working Group (ISWG), the GSTC strives to promote sustainable tourism through the adoption and creation of universal principles for sustainable tourism. Its standard setting strategy focuses on the management and revision of current versions of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria and the creation or adaptation and distribution of additional criteria, standards and relevant indicators.

The role of the ISWG in this revision process is identified as:

- Guiding the revision process, which is resourced by the GSTC Secretariat and informed by relevant GSTC Working Groups (in this case the Destination Stewardship Working Group (DSWG) which aims at assisting destinations in maintaining their cultural, environmental and socio-economic integrity through implementation of the GSTC Destinations Program.)
- Considering comments from two rounds of public consultation before adopting criteria, based on consensus across the balance of interested parties.
- Making recommendations to the GSTC Board of Directors, for formal adoption and public release.

Key requirements of the revision process for GSTC-Destination were identified in a paper prepared for a meeting of the International Standards Working Group of the GSTC on 21 September 2018. The paper was seen as the first step in reviewing standard-setting procedures prior to consultation on the revision of GSTC-D. It set out a detailed review of GSTC Compliance with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice: Setting Social and Environmental Standards, Version 6.0 – December 2014 in relation to proposals relating to GSTC-D (Destination) Criteria and their planned revision in 2018-19.

Broadly, these cover the need for:

- Transparent procedures
- Published Terms of Reference, covering the need for, and scope of, the standard, stated outcomes and associated risks
- Stakeholder identification
- Public availability of a summary of the process
- Public consultation, giving stakeholders sufficient time to provide input and opportunity to see how their input has been taken into account
- A consultation process which is open to all and seeks to achieve balance of interests
- Seeking to address constraints faced by disadvantaged stakeholders
- Striving to achieve consensus
- Clear decision-making procedures and protocols

Protocols for thresholds of decision-making for the ISWG and GSTC Board are covered by the By-Laws of Global Sustainable Tourism Council, adopted by the Board on September 24, 2010, amended by the Board November 3, 2011. Second Amendment by the Board December 18, 2014

4.2 Program stages and timetable

For revision of GSTC-D, compliance with the Standards-Setting Code, which is one of three ISEAL Alliance Codes of Good Practice, requires just one round of consultation, with 60 days for comment submission by stakeholders. However, GSTC has already served notice that it intends to carry out two rounds of consultation and the following schedule is based on this assumption.

Stakeholder identification and assembling lists of consultees is currently underway. ISWG will notify Destination Stewardship Working Group of the revision process and their opportunities to participate.

Round 1 consultation will be based on an online survey, to be launched on 1st December 2018 and to continue to early March 2019. This gives in excess of 90 days. The longer time span reflects the need to enable access to certain groups that may be difficult to reach.

From early March to end May 2019, a gap of three months will elapse between closing Round 1 and opening Round 2 Consultation. This allows for systematic organization and review of the comments received, drafting an individual response for each comment and, on the basis of this, proposing a first set of draft GSTC-D. These will be presented to a meeting of ISWG, to take place late April 2019, allowing one month to assimilate their views and prepare documentation for Round 2.

Round 2 consultation will start in early June. One full month would be sufficient for ISEAL compliance, but it is proposed to allow two months.

Based on experience from the revision of GSTC-I, at least a further three months will be required for further processing, two meetings of ISWG and achieving GSTC Board Approval prior to final publication. Four months has been allowed due to the intervening holiday period.

The schedule can be summarised as:

- Start December: Announcement through publication of these Terms of Reference
- Early December – early March: First round consultation
- Early March – end May: Resolution/publish response to comments
- Start June – end July: Second round consultation
- Start August – end November: Final revision; ISWG and Board approval.

4.3 Stakeholder mapping, outreach and promotion

The GSTC undertook a major consultation process for the development of the GSTC Destination Criteria and has a good understanding of the key stakeholders. In addition, the GSTC has developed a wide stakeholder data base including national level and international tourism organisations and industry bodies

and tourism sector groups. Other stakeholders such as conservation NGO's and certification programs are included.

To obtain the widest possible response to the consultation, the following approaches will be used:

- GSTC website announcement
- Direct email out to all stakeholders on the GSTC stakeholder/contacts list
- Announcement on social media (Facebook/LinkedIn)
- Extended promotion through key tourism industry bodies sending the announcement to their members/contacts (e.g. PATA, WTTC), international agencies (UNWTO, UNEP).

Members of ISWG represent a wide range of interests in standards for tourism sustainability across the globe. Members of ISWG and DSWG, together with bodies with GSTC-Recognised destination standards, are considered to provide a good basis for identifying stakeholders with an interest in GSTC-D and are invited to contribute to the list of stakeholders. ISWG will notify GSTC's Destination Stewardship Working Group (DSWG).

A shortlist of target organisations providing coverage of key issues represented across Sections A-D of the Criteria has been drawn up by the GSTC CEO. Currently this includes: WWF, IUCN TAPAS, IUCN Green List, ICOMOS ICTC, ECPAT. These bodies will be approached directly and, where relevant, asked to coordinate comments from their members/network.

As with GSTC-I, it is proposed that a breakdown of respondent characteristics is provided to ISWG following Round 1 consultation for GSTC-D. ISWG will then be in a position to review whether additional steps need to be taken in targeting Round 2 consultation to achieve a balance of interests in the subject matter and in the geographic scope to which the standard applies.

Previous comments from ISEAL have emphasized the need to focus on disadvantaged stakeholders. This may include, for example, rural tourism stakeholders and anyone beyond the digital divide and from non-English speakers. ISWG are considering additional measures which may be taken to include alternative mechanisms and tools to encourage participation by stakeholders with limited access to online material or to offer participation in an alternative language and how this could be implemented.